

Saint Mary's College of California

Saint Mary's Digital Commons

The Undergraduate Spectrum

1-1-2010

Spectrum 2010

Saint Mary's College of California

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.stmarys-ca.edu/undergraduate-spectrum>



Part of the [Rhetoric and Composition Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Saint Mary's College of California, "Spectrum 2010" (2010). *The Undergraduate Spectrum*. 37.
<https://digitalcommons.stmarys-ca.edu/undergraduate-spectrum/37>

This Issue is brought to you for free and open access by Saint Mary's Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Undergraduate Spectrum by an authorized administrator of Saint Mary's Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@stmarys-ca.edu.

SPECTRUM 2010



Saint Mary's College of California

SPECTRUM

A Journal of Student Writing

Saint Mary's College of California

2010

SPECTRUM 2010:

A Journal of Student Writing

What is Spectrum? Spectrum is an annual competition in essay writing sponsored by the Composition Program at Saint Mary's College. Now in its twenty-third year, Spectrum honors all Saint Mary's students who take writing seriously, who, in response to course assignments, write essays that are original, thoughtful, and persuasive. Submissions are read by a panel of judges and cash awards are given at the end of each spring semester. Winning essays are published the following fall in the journal you presently hold in your hands.

Spectrum seeks to publish essays from a wide range of disciplines, and all undergraduates at Saint Mary's College are encouraged to submit essays written as part of their coursework for consideration.

Submissions for the 2011 context may be submitted as follows: 1) via campus mail to Spectrum, c/o Professor David DeRose, Department of English; 2) dropped off in the zebra-striped box on the third floor of Dante Hall; or 3) sent as email attachments to Professor David DeRose (dderose@stmarys-ca.edu). All submissions must include a cover sheet with the author's name, phone number, and email address, and the name of the faculty member and course for which the essay was written.

We thank this year's dedicated judges who selected five outstanding essays for prizes out of over forty essays submitted:

Paul Barrett

Nicholas Leither

Derek Marks

Jim Sciuto

Rosemary Graham

Sandra Grayson

Thank you also to all the students who submitted excellent essays and all the faculty members who encouraged students to submit their best work. Enjoy the essays in this issue of Spectrum:

- *Michael Niebuhr's First Prize Essay chronicles the uncomfortable transformation of Hip-Hop music from a vehicle exposing the plight of urban poverty to an advertisement for shallow materialism.*
- *In her Second Prize Essay, Natalee Grimes compares the manner in which two female poets scrutinize their bodies and critique our fixation with the female form.*
- *Indrani Sengupta's Third Prize Essay examines the critical arguments for and against claims that Huckleberry Finn promotes racism.*
- *Kassi Rasmussen employs Gaze Theory to dissect the popular television reality show, "What Not to Wear."*
- *In her Honorable Mention Essay, Kristen Hatfield disarms the Science/Faith debate with both fervor and analytic rigor.*

The cover photograph, entitled "Motion Sickness," is by Thomas Vo, a Junior Physics and Business double major with a minor in Creative Writing. Thomas is a photographer for St. Mary's Magazine and The Collegian. He comments: "Motion Sickness was shot at a carnival I went to for Chinese New Year. It is three images stacked on top of each other, to get the motion effect. These kinds of rides scare me to death."

His photographs can be seen at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/thomasvophotography/>

Finally, extra special thanks to Gail Drexler for coordinating the contest, helping with production of the journal, and innumerable other services without which Spectrum would not exist.

For the English Department,

David J. DeRose

Faculty Moderator, *Spectrum* 2010

Spectrum 2010

First Prize

- Michael Niebuhr, "They Go Unsung: Hip-Hop as a Voice for the Poor" 5**
English 5, Research and Argument
Professor Lisa Manter

Second Prize

- Natalee Grimes, "Real Women Have Curves" 17**
English 19, Intro to Literary Analysis
Professor Janice Doane

Third Prize

- Indrani Sengupta, "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: Point or Moot Point?" 23**
English 29, Issues in Literary Study
Professor Lisa Manter

Best Freshman Essay

- Kassi Rasmussen, "Love it or Hate it" 33**
English 4, Composition
Professor Carol Beran

Honorable Mention

- Kristen Hatfield, "The Catholic Viewpoint of Science – and Evolution" 41**
Biology 115, Theory of Evolution
Professor Rebecca Jabbour

They Go Unsung: Hip-Hop as a Voice for the Poor

by Michael Niebuhr

What has happened to Hip Hop culture's music? For over twenty years, rap dedicated its notes and lyrics to lifting the trials of poverty into the American consciousness. Today, however, "rap" has changed into a genre of music that can hardly be called the same name, filled not with social and political commentary, but shallow materialism and sex. This new brand of rap music is not only a blight on the face of Hip Hop culture, but it robs the genre of the high purpose that rap artists dedicated so many years to fulfilling: making sure that the reality of urban poverty reached the ears of people all over the country. As a result, many critics accuse rap as a whole of both driving black culture backward and bastardizing its music. In its prime, Hip Hop culture was ultimately defined by the trials of urban poverty, and as such its music provided the outside listener with a uniquely direct link to those in poverty and the issues they face on a day-to-day basis; in the present, however, popular culture has robbed Hip Hop of its message, and replaced it with mindless music that contributes nothing to the poor community that gave birth to the movement in the first place.

Hip Hop as a cultural movement began in the early 1970's, amid the run-down tenement blocks of the South Bronx (Katel). The emergence of Hip Hop at this time was no coincidence: it occurred almost immediately after a drastic transformation that completely changed the face of the housing projects. Prior to the 1970's, the South Bronx was

actually a fairly safe and comfortable place to live. Although the area housed mostly working-class families, it was far from a ghetto. All of the families who moved in had two parents, and most of the fathers had jobs working in various factories or stores around the area. For the children, the Bronx had schools and community centers which offered an array of after-school programs in art, music, and sports. Youths had not only positive, constructive activities to take part in, but adult supervision. Perhaps most critical, however, was the feeling the residents had that "...life was getting better, that people heading families were living better than their parents had, and that their children were going to do even better than they had" (Naison). There was an immense feeling of hope that ran through the community, a feeling that the American Dream was real and might even be close at hand for residents and their children.

That rosy vision began to grey in the late 1960's, when heroin first found its way into the South Bronx. The influx came on like an opiate-laced tsunami, and the projects saw those who had once been decent, hard-working members of the community now willing to lead a life of "crime and humiliation and self destruction" (Torgoff 39), all for the sake of finding the next high. The drug addicts weren't the only cause of the degradation; as the situation got worse, the projects saw more and more fathers walking out on their families. Some were addicts themselves, others were "...frustrated by their inability to support their wives and children at a time when the factory jobs they worked at were beginning to leave the Bronx" (Naison). As it was traditionally men who took up the role of policing the community, the resulting lack of males in the projects allowed gang leaders and drug dealers to populate the area after they left (Naison). Within a decade, the old

picture of projects in the South Bronx was all but erased, replaced by the trappings of a modern ghetto.

It was amid all this unrest and chaos that the culture of Hip Hop emerged. In the spirit of the adage, "in darkness there is light," the founders of Hip Hop were able to create a social movement the likes of which had never been seen. Granted, the original Hip Hop DJ, Cool Herc, wasn't so much concerned about creating a social movement as with throwing parties; nonetheless, Hip Hop seemed to develop more and more cultural ties as more performers came forward. Next after Cool Herc came Afrika Bambatta, an ex-gang leader who used Hip Hop in an attempt to spread a message of brotherhood to the various Bronx gangs (Naison). Alongside the pounding of bass beats at Bambatta's many parties, hired MCs rapped about political issues, imploring the gangs to live at peace with each other. Bambatta's goal was spawned from living in the South Bronx after it's decomposition in the sixties: "...just being a young person and seeing all this happening around me put a lot of consciousness in my mind to get up and do something; it played a strong role in trying to say, 'We've got to stop this violence with the street gangs'" (Bambatta, quoted in Naison). This was the first time Hip Hop had been used for a purpose beyond dancing. Bambatta used Hip Hop to create a podium from which he could address the masses. From that point onward, Hip Hop would be inexorably tied to the struggles of urban poverty.

By 1990, Hip Hop had transformed into not only a cultural movement in the ghetto, but a way for the poor community to speak out and have their voice heard. A new generation of rappers had risen up in the Hip Hop world, and its members were focused

not on uniting the black community as Afrika Bambatta was, but telling the truth about life in poor areas across the country. The transformation began in the early 1980's, when groups of rappers like Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five and Public Enemy came onto the Hip Hop scene. These "second generation" rap groups focused their lyrics on politics, current events, and the pains of life in the ghetto. Grandmaster Flash's style of social commentary was the embodiment of the second generation of Hip Hop MCs. Their music focused predominantly on social issues like gang disputes, racism, police brutality, and dealing with the underprivileged life. Rap continued to follow the example set by these early groups, and by the 90's Hip Hop's musical message had become almost exclusively about spreading the word about American poverty. Instead of painting an optimistic picture of the black community as one large family as Bambatta did, performers like 2Pac (Tupac Shakur) and Nas (Nasir bin Olu Dara Jones) sang about the gritty reality of ghetto life, and in each line there was the underlying question: "what are you going to do about it?" Here was a kind of music serving a higher purpose than entertainment; it sought to inform.

Hip Hop's purpose can be seen in any number of 90's rap songs. In Tupac's rap "Changes," the message is undeniable as he sings, "I see no changes wake up in the morning and I ask myself / Is life worth living should I blast myself? / I'm tired of bein' poor and even worse I'm black / My stomach hurts so I'm lookin' for a purse to snatch." Like most poetry, Shakur packs much meaning into a few words. In four lines, he addresses depression, racism, and desperation, all three caused by the presence of poverty. "Lookin' for a purse to snatch" is a particularly interesting line, as it hints at the moral

flexibility that results when a person finds it hard to make even the most basic ends meet. Soon after, Shakur raps, "It's time to fight back that's what Huey said / Two shots in the dark, now Huey's dead / I got love for my brother but we can never go nowhere / Unless we share with each other / We gotta start makin' changes / Learn to see me as a brother instead of two distant strangers." In this lyrical section, Tupac makes an allusion to Huey P. Newton, the leader of the Black Panthers. However, Shakur casts him in a negative light; Newton said violence was the answer, and in the end it killed him and nothing changed. Tupac then goes on to say that only through mutual understanding can people coexist with one another. The message of cooperation is reiterated during the bridge, where Shakur says, "It's time for us as a people to start makin' some changes / Let's change the way we eat, let's change the way we live / And let's change the way we treat each other / You see the old way wasn't working so it's on us to do / what we gotta do, to survive." The bridge of the song is a call to action, telling those listening that all they have to do to improve their situation is learn to work together; and the message isn't directed at the black community, but the "community" in its largest sense. In just one song, Tupac manages to touch many points across the spectrum of poverty, and uses music to become a spokesperson for the poor.

Tupac Shakur's style of rap music was by no means an isolated incident. Nasir bin Olu Dara Jones, or Nas, was another popular 90's rap artist who often wrote lyrics dealing with the social issues of poverty. His song "Thugz Mansion" is about longing for a safe place in the ghetto to escape from all its problems. In it, he mentions several reasons for escaping. For example, he brings up how poor youth turn to lives of crime for

lack of better opportunities, saying, "This kid was he was the vintage stick 'em up pro / sixteen years old did his jail since there was nowhere to go / he insane already gone mad...dangerous street corners where his sets at." Nas reiterates a fact already set down by many sociologists: the lack of job opportunities for youth in poor neighborhoods drives them into the underground economy, or into crime.

Continuing on his exposé, Nas also sings a verse in imaginary post-mortis, as if he is talking to his mother from Heaven. In it, he sings, "Dear mama don't cry, your baby boy's doin' good / Tell the homies I'm in heaven and it ain't got hoods / Lil' Latasha sure grown, tell the lady in the liquor store that she's forgiven / So come home." "Lil' Latasha" is an allusion to a fifteen-year-old girl named Latasha Harlins who was shot in the back of the head in a South Los Angeles liquor store. The girl had put some orange juice into her backpack and was going to pay for it when she was assaulted by the store owner, who thought Latasha was trying to steal. Latasha defended herself, and then threw the juice on the counter and turned to walk out. The owner pulled a shotgun from below the counter and shot Latasha in the back of the head ("Merchant"). This kind of incident never would have occurred in a well-off neighborhood grocery store; Nas is rapping about the inequalities between America's economic tiers. He carries on this message with the lyrics, "A place where death doesn't reside, jus' thugs who collide / Not to start beef but to spark trees, no cops rollin' by / No policemen, no homicide, no chalk on the streets...'Cause I feel like my eyes saw too much sufferin' / I'm just twenty-some odd years I done lost my mother."

Many of the problems people are forced to deal with every day in poor communities seem like unimaginable tragedies to those in a better situation; and that is exactly why Hip Hop is so valuable. For many, poverty is an issue that never even crosses the mind. The fact that poverty is so regionalized – with most of the poor living in segregated areas of large cities – means that it is an issue that is incredibly easy to ignore. A donation during the holiday season or a drop-off at Goodwill after spring cleaning may be the most people do for the poor in a given year. However, Hip Hop gave the poor a distinct and forceful voice; suddenly, it was almost impossible to ignore the issues going on in ghettos across the country. They were being projected in music videos on TV, played through the speakers of the radio, and debated on the news. CD's shouting the poor lifestyle to the world were being played on stereos in middle- and upper-class homes all over the country. Hip Hop succeeded in doing what most social movements only dream of: they made their cause virtually impossible to ignore. A single house party in the South Bronx, 1973, had sparked a movement that brought the issue of poverty out of the shadows and into the spotlight of American consciousness.

Admittedly, the situation wasn't that clear-cut. While it's true that Hip Hop was pervasive almost everywhere, those who heard it didn't always receive its message. Rap music's intense depictions of violence and crime, as well as prolific swearing, led many people to believe it was a cultural blight, a good portion of them African-Americans. Bill Cosby said in 2006, "They put the word 'nigga' in a song, and we get up and dance to it" (quoted in Katel 531). The thought that rappers were glorifying hate speech was not the only problem; others criticized rap artists as "Illiterates with gold and diamonds in their

teeth” (Katel 544) and accused them of undermining black social progress. At first glance, the critics seem to be right. A few lines in a Tupac song embody both of the complaints coming from Hip Hop critics: “Cops give a damn about a negro / Pull the trigger kill a nigga he’s a hero / Give the crack to the kids who the hell cares / One less hungry mouth on the welfare / First ship ‘em dope and let ‘em deal the brothers / Give ‘em guns step back watch ‘em kill each other” (Shakur, “Changes”). To those who oppose Hip Hop, these words represent evil set to a beat. However, rap often takes more than a cursory look. Shakur isn’t saying that every cop in the country takes pride in shooting black people; he’s using a graphic metaphor to talk about the inequality that blacks are susceptible to at the hands of the law. It’s an unfortunate fact that police presence in poor black areas is almost nonexistent, and often emergency services don’t even respond to 911 calls. The sociologist Sudhir Venkatesh, who spent years researching life in the ghetto firsthand, wrote about the authorities’ unwilling nature when it comes to responding to emergencies in poor neighborhoods in his book *Gang Leader for a Day*. After a woman is beaten senseless and her fellow tenant residents call 911, Venkatesh writes, “...there was no ambulance. Provident Hospital was only two miles away” (Venkatesh). It’s evident that if an ambulance isn’t willing to make a two-mile trip to help a victim of domestic violence, the amount of aid for residents in poor areas is dismally low. What’s more, no police came to the scene to apprehend the man who did the beating. That is the message that Shakur is trying to get across: that the justice system is often biased, and the poor are often ignored even when they legitimately require help. The message is certainly not that cops inherently hate blacks and shoot them for sport.

Obviously, knee-jerk reactions are not reliable when it comes to understanding the lyrics of Hip Hop artists. The same applies to the next line of the Tupac's verse. For most people, the fact that Shakur even mentions the selling of crack to children is "glorifying the thug life" (Katel 532). However, the exact opposite is true. Shakur isn't glorifying anything; instead, he is *demonizing* drug trafficking. As with most rap music from the 80's and 90's, Tupac is rapping about "largely inspirational messages to reinforce self-respect" (Lott 82). Additionally, rap was a message to the public that worked to dispel the "hegemony of television's image of black people" (Lott 80). This may seem counterintuitive at first; after all, if you are going to dispel stereotypes, why fill your songs with the very same subjects you're trying to distance yourself from? The key, it turns out, is to advocate their cessation, as Tupac and Nas are doing in the above examples. Whereas the mass media paints the ghetto's inhabitants as the source of crime and moral decay, rappers reached out through their music to say that the problems arise from the circumstances, not the people themselves. The problem is, many people don't look past the surface, pulling out individual phrases that sound incriminating rather than hearing the song as a whole. It's this sort of shallow listening that makes it impossible for the true message of Hip Hop to get through.

In recent years, the words of critics have become harder and harder to disprove. The days of progressive, socially-conscious rap music are quickly diminishing. In their place, a new, shallower, and much less meaningful genre of rap has taken over. Whereas Hip Hop in the 80's and 90's focused on getting the message about the problems in the ghetto out into the public ear and disassembling stereotypes, the new generation of rap music concentrates on glorifying personal wealth, materialism, and sexuality. While these

kinds of rap have always existed in a marginal way, only more recently have they had a chance to take center stage. Listeners once focused on socially conscious Hip Hop while the less meaningful material sat on the sidelines. The most popular artists of the 80's and 90's – Public Enemy, Grandmaster Flash, Tupac, Nas, among others – prove this point; popular artists in rap's earlier days were focused on sending a social and political message through their music. Today, however, rap is hardly worthy of the past art it was birthed from. Socially conscious rappers do still exist, but they have taken on the marginal role previously reserved for less meaningful material, so much so that socially conscious rap music has begun to be identified as “underground” or “unsigned” rap.

Meanwhile, songs at the top of the charts not only fail to match the high aims of past rap artists, but are largely mindless trifles about materialism and exercises in egotistical chest-puffing. In the eighties, Grandmaster Flash sang, “I can't take the smell, can't take the noise...I tried to get away, but I couldn't get far / Cause the man with the tow-truck repossessed my car...Got a bum education, double-digit inflation / Can't take the train to the job, there's a strike at the station” (Saddler). In 2008, rapper Lil' Wayne said, “If you got money / and you know it / take it out your pocket and show it / throw it” (Carter). Other examples of present-day rap music's meaningless rhymes include “Smack That” by Akon and “Buy You A Drank” by T-Pain: both popular songs, both completely devoid of social meaning. Good music isn't just a beat thrown behind a voice crying “This is why I'm better than you.” Real music is a “vehicle used as a medium of social comment, criticism, and protest...music is an expression of emotions, consciousness of the world, moods, concerns, aspirations and desperations” (Walter 5). Present day rap does none of these things; most of the time, “artists” are concerned not with what they are

singing about, but the gain that comes from it. What's more, the enormous difference between the emotionally rousing and socially aware lyrics of classic rappers and the shallow tunes of the present day comes at the cost of the poor. When Hip Hop was first invented, it gave a voice to those previously constrained to sitting silently in the shadows. Classic Hip Hop worked to bring the ugliness of American poverty out from under the bed, only to have its modern equivalent sweep it back under the rug, all in the name of commercialism. Sadly, as a result, many of the difficulties the poor face today inevitably go unsung.

Works Cited

- Carter, Michael D. "Got Money." Perf. Lil' Wayne and T-Pain. Tha Carter (III). Cash Money, Universal, & Young Money, 2008.
- Jones, Nasir O.D. "Thugz Mansion." Perf. Nas. God's Son. Columbia, 2002.
- Katel, Peter. "Debating Hip-Hop." CQ Researcher 17.23 (2007). CQ Researcher Online. CQ Press. St. Mary's College of California Library, Moraga, CA. 23 March 2009 <<http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/document.php?id=cqresre2007061500&type=hitlist&num=0>>.
- Lott, Tommy L. "Marooned in America: Black Urban Youth Culture and Social Pathology." The Underclass Question. Philadelphia: Temple U Press, 1992. 71-89.
- "Merchant Charged in Girl's Fatal Shooting." The New York Times 22 March 1991, sec. A: 16.
- Naison, Mark. . "From Doo Wop to Hip Hop: The Bittersweet Odyssey of African-Americans in the South Bronx." Socialism and Democracy 18.2 (2004): 37. Alt-Press Watch (APW). ProQuest. St Mary's College - SCELC. 31 Mar. 2009 <<http://www.proquest.com/>>
- Saddler, Joseph. "The Message." Perf. Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five. The Message. Sugar Hill, 1982.
- Shakur, Tupac. "Changes." Perf. 2Pac. Greatest Hits. Death Row, 1998.
- Shakur, Tupac. "One Day At A Time." Perf. 2Pac. Unreleased.

Torgoff, Martin. Can't Find My Way Home: America in the Great Stoned Age, 1945-2000. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004.

Walter, Allen R. "Figurative Language of Disadvantaged Blacks as Related to Poverty, Music, Poetry, Language and Reading." [Http://www.eric.ed.gov](http://www.eric.ed.gov). 1974. US Department of Education. 25 March 2009 <http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/31/bd/e4.pdf>.

Michael Niebuhr is a junior Biology major and Music minor, but is considering a major in English. It was a dual passion for music and writing, as well as the undeniable overlap of the musical world with the written word that became the inspiration for this essay.

Real Women Have Curves

by Natalee Grimes

Splashed across the covers of fashion magazines, dissected for flaws in the local gossip column, admired from your living room as you watch *E!*'s coverage of the latest red carpet event—obsession with the female body is everywhere. If we aren't enviously admiring a woman's shape, then we are tearing her down for not living up to our expectations of what a "real" woman should look like. Cultural fixation on bodily perfection is bound to influence how women view their own bodies and cause them to criticize themselves; many women have come to view their bodies as a piece of art. Millions of friends, lovers, family members—anyone who has ever been asked, "Does my butt look fat in these jeans?"—can attest to the power of this social pressure to have the "right" body. When faced with this pressure, a woman can either choose to do everything she can to conform to what she thinks she should be, or she can be satisfied with who she truly is. These two opposing attitudes are represented by Eavan Boland's "Anorexic" and Lucille Clifton's "Homage to my hips." Both female speakers of these poems join in the cultural scrutiny of their bodies. While the speaker of "Anorexic" feels trapped by her body and enslaved by its many needs and desires, the speaker of "Homage to my hips" embraces her body as something which enables her freedom and is itself free and beautiful.

In Boland's "Anorexic," the speaker uses strong, angry words to show the hatred and disgust she has for her body. She calls her body a "heretic," a "witch," and a "bitch,"

each of which is an extremely impactful title with a strictly negative connotation. Claiming "My flesh is heretic," Boland accuses her body of actively turning against her. Not only does she find fault with any excess fat she may have, but she has gone so far as accusing her actual flesh of being a sin. She sees her body as evil, calling it "a witch" that she must punish and destroy. In order to have this view, this desire for self-destruction, the speaker must completely disconnect her mind from her body. Several lines into the poem, Boland begins referring to her body as "she"; it is now seen as a completely separate entity from herself. In her eyes, her body no longer belongs to her. Instead it is its own being, one with which she was once united; but it has since gone rogue, and now seeks her destruction. The speaker sees the "half truths/ of her fevers" as a tool in this malicious plot, her body is trying to trick her into believing that she must eat in order to survive. The sickness which comes with her refusal to eat is the culmination of her body's deceit. And yet, the speaker perseveres! In her eyes, she wins because she overcomes this trickery and "Now the bitch is burning." By calling her own body a bitch, the speaker shows just how much she truly hates her body. "Bitch" is a term usually reserved for those who are cruel, hateful women, and the speaker imagines her body to personify these characteristics. It has betrayed her and now it must be punished.

In addition to her word choice, Boland uses graphic images of punishment in order to demonstrate the speaker's resentful attitude towards her body. The speaker believes that her body has so betrayed her that drastic action must be taken in order to punish it. She says, "I am burning it/ Yes I am torching/ her curves and paps and wiles./ They scorch in my self denials." She wants to destroy the curves, body parts, and very essence of what makes her body feminine. Not only does the speaker wish to destroy her body,

but her womanhood as well. And by doing this, by taking away all her curves and leaving herself a walking skeleton, the speaker believes her body “has learned her lesson.” That the speaker can look at her emaciated body as a “lesson” is a terrifying thought—showing how little stock she puts into her own well-being. She does not think she is worth much as a human being and her attitude towards her body is simply a representation of that self-hatred.

The speaker in “Anorexic” believes that it is her body and her womanhood which limit her and cause her unhappiness. Nearly 20 lines into the poem, she has successfully starved herself so that she is on the brink of death and as “Thin as a rib.” In this line, the speaker reverts back to the initial state of womanhood as it is portrayed in the creation myth of the Book of Genesis—a rib taken from the side of a man, Adam, in order to be given life. By starving her body so it can once again take the shape of a rib, the speaker is effectively giving up being a woman to be part of a man. The speaker says, “Only a little more,/ only a few more days/ sinless, foodless,/ I will slip/ back into him again/ as if I had never been away.” This is where the speaker’s motive for starving herself becomes clear: her desire to punish her body for mankind’s initial sin—when Eve introduced sin into the world by eating a piece of the forbidden fruit. And so, the speaker attempts to atone for this stolen fruit by starving her body of all food. It was sins of the flesh that supposedly stole humankind from the Garden of Eden, and the speaker will punish her flesh for its similarly sinful desires which result in “sweat and fat and greed.”

Lucille Clifton’s “Homage to my hips” exhibits a strikingly different attitude towards a woman’s body. Using simple, everyday words, she illustrates how natural it is for the speaker to love her body. When describing her hips, the speaker calls them “big,”

“free,” “mighty,” and “magic.” Each of these words is unpretentious and common, and could be used to describe any number of things that one loves. Interestingly, the words the speaker uses are in direct contrast to the size of her hips. While her words are short and unassuming, her hips are large and demand to be noticed. This is the opposite of the words the speaker of “Anorexic” uses, which are rather lofty and specific. For example, her use of the word “heretic” is full of negative connotations, which none of the words in Clifton’s poem are. Perhaps the speaker in “Homage to my hips” does not use these types of words out of respect for her hips; after all, they should be the center of attention and using big words to describe them would only hinder that. Clifton’s poem also contains no capitalization and little punctuation, another way in which she allows the speaker’s body to be the center of attention. Her hips “don’t like to be held back” and will not be contained or forced to live by anyone’s standards— not even those of common literary devices. Her hips embrace the freedom they have and in turn help the narrator to feel free herself because she is not hindered by self-hatred.

The freeing and happy images that Clifton uses to describe her hips support the poem’s tone of joy and satisfaction. The speaker is rejoicing in her body, truly happy to be who she is. She first shows the freedom her hips enjoy by describing how they “don’t fit into little/ petty places.” This is the opposite of what the speaker of “Anorexic” tries to do. By starving herself and trying to make herself as small as possible, she hopes to be “Caged so/ I will grow/ angular and holy.” Defying all logic, the speaker of “Anorexic” thinks that allowing herself to be controlled and contained will somehow allow her to “grow” as a person. But this logic will not do for the hips in “Homage to my hips”. After all, “these hips have never been enslaved,/ they go where they want to go/ they do what

they want to do.” Given this image of freedom, the audience cannot doubt that these hips are a force to be reckoned with. They have power and independence, the things which the narrator of “Anorexic” goes to great lengths to deny her body of. The speaker of “Homage to my hips” understands the power that her hips have and the power this has given her as well. She has even “known them/ to put a spell on a man and/ spin him like a top!” Unlike the speaker in “Anorexic”, she isn’t allowing any part of herself to be controlled by men; instead, she controls them with the aid of her “magic” hips. She utilizes her body, the body she so loves and admires, to dominate those who would historically be in the position of power.

The female speakers of the two poems respond quite differently in the face of the intense scrutiny their bodies are under. While the speaker of “Anorexic” shows an obvious disgust for her body and understands it to be the source of all her faults, the speaker of “Homage to my hips” loves her body and finds it to be a cause of great joy in her life. Both “Anorexic” and “Homage to my hips” portray a woman’s body that is somehow separate from the woman herself, able to feel and act independently of the woman herself. But while the speaker in “Homage to my hips” fully embraces the nature of her hips and admires how they seem to speak for themselves; the narrator of “Anorexic” is unable to do so. Instead, her body’s needs and desires terrify and anger her. They make her feel out of control; and she attempts to regain control by starving her body as it’s “punishment.” Ironically, by doing so, she only serves to give control to men, and especially to those men who have debased women throughout history. The speaker of “Homage to my hips” won’t give away her power in that way. Like her hips, she won’t be held back or

enslaved by anyone, let alone a man. She has the power to define herself and to ascribe no limits to her potential.

Work Cited

Boland, Evan. "Anorexic." And Clifton, Lucille. "Homage to my hips." *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, Drama, and Writing*. Ed. X.J. Kennedy and Dana Gioia. 10th Edition. New York: Pearson Longman, 2007. 1088-1095. Print.

Natalee Grimes is a junior pursuing a double major in Psychology and English. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, discovering new music, and spending time with good friends.

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: Point or Moot Point?

Banning, Embracing, and Deconstructing Binaries

By Indrani Sengupta

Towards the end of Chapter 23 in Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, there is a scene that illustrates the controversial presentation of race in the text. The character of Jim is weeping, "thinking about his family, away and yonder, and he was low and home-sick" (154), and Huck is sympathetic to his plight. It is possible to see this as the moment that Huck recognizes Jim's humanity, his similarity to white people. He comments, "I do believe that he cared just as much for his people as white people does for their'n" (154). He is thus able to look beyond the racism of his time. But then Huck goes on to state that "it don't seem natural" (154) for a black man to love his family like a white man. Juxtaposed to the previous statement, this observation might serve as evidence of Huck's racism. These two viewpoints are entirely opposite to each other, yet they are derived from the same scene, and are thus supported by sufficient evidence from the text. They are entirely dissimilar, and yet simultaneously valid.

Some critics state that the text, and the author himself, are wholly and completely racist: reflecting, propagating and encouraging the racism of the time in which the story is set. Others state that the text is the polar opposite of this. It actually *undercuts* racism and the evil institution of slavery through the use of irony, humor, and the positive presentation of Jim and his friendship with Huck. Still other critics take various stances in

between these two extremes, collectively producing a vast spectrum of dissimilar opinion. Even more astonishing than the fact that so many critics could have so many distinct perspectives about one single text, is the fact that each of these critics has provided sufficient evidence to bolster her/his claims. There is an enormous amount of evidence to state that the text is completely and unforgivably racist, as critics such as Julius Lester and Jane Smiley have. Finding their arguments highly convincing, I, too, would have done so, if critics such as Seymour Chwast and Justin Kaplan had not been equally convincing in arguing the opposite.

The only explanation that I can find is that of Stanley Fish's "interpretive communities." We read in a text what we have been taught, by society, to read. Our own individual experiences through life, our upbringing, our race, gender, sexual orientation, social class, etc, collectively define our outlook when receiving the message of a text, or, better yet, when applying a message/meaning to the text. Which is why the race question is so pertinent today, whereas at the time the text was first published people were immune to its racial implications, instead focusing on the "immoral" and "unethical" aspects of the text- the fact that Huck rebels against social norms, rejects heaven in favor of hell, etc- something we today find rather laughable.

Perhaps the concept of "interpretive communities" can be used to explain the ambiguity of the text's presentation of race, or, rather, the ambiguity with which the text is perceived. The critics that state that the text is racist appeal strongly to the reader's sense of *ethics*, to the widely held belief in today's society that racism is wrong, utterly inexcusable. If someone perceives the slightest sign of racism in a text, everyone must immediately reject the text or risk the label of "racist" being attached to his own person. I had

read the text for the first time when I was nine. I was at an age where I knew nothing of the existence of racism, and, likewise, was unable to perceive any of it in the text. Now, more than eight years older and fully socialized about the evils of racism, I was not only predisposed to perceiving racism in the text (having been informed by my class and by the essays that there was irrefutable evidence to the fact), I actually wanted to see it, because not seeing how backward the text is would point towards some inherent backwardness in myself.

The critics that state that the text is not racist, on the other hand, attempt to appeal to the reader's sense of *objective reason*. Obviously none of them feel that racism is, in any way, acceptable. But, they say, the text isn't racist! Not only should it not be condemned, it should be lauded, for it skillfully and humorously undercuts racism. Justin Kaplan states that a reader would have to be unreasonable and "deliberately dense" (379) not to see this. And, of course, I wouldn't want to seem *dense*. Seymour Chwast states that if you look at the text in the context of the time in which it was written, and in the context of the time in which the plot is set, the novel is perfectly acceptable, because it is historically viable. Slavery and racism were once a bitter reality. You cannot deny this and you cannot criticize a text for accurately portraying reality. Such critics seem to point to the fact that any racism perceived in the text is a failure to see the true meaning of the text, a failure to look at the text objectively, settling instead for a subjective overreaction.

So it seems to be a choice between being ethical, but unreasonable, and being reasonable, but unethical, between subjective ethics and objective reason. It's an impossible choice, an insoluble dilemma, for someone belonging to most interpretive communities in today's society, a society which lauds both ethics and reason, and criticizes anyone who lacks one or the other.

Peaches Henry describes both sides of the debate, shifting from one perspective to the other in quick succession, and thus portraying the validity of both arguments while retaining her own neutrality. Her essay reflects my own ambivalence over the issue. Initially incredulous that a book as seemingly innocent and lighthearted as *Huck Finn* could possibly propagate racist attitudes, I soon accepted, somewhat hesitantly, that it does, but hoped that by using the same reason and objectivity that critics such as Kaplan and Chwast advocate, readers would be able to look beyond its backwardness and selectively extract the humor and the sense of adventure that I once loved about this text. However, I could not ignore the argument presented in the past by several enraged Black parents, described by Henry in her essay. The text has the potential to stir up racism today. It has the potential to humiliate young Black students today. This is a real danger, a real issue. Who am I to say that it isn't? Who am I, or any of the critics who state that the text is not racist, who underplay the importance of subjective responses to the text, to make it seem that anyone who is offended by the text is not "reasonable?" In the last eight years, I've been socialized about the evils of racism. But, at least on a firsthand basis, I still don't know what racism is. I don't know what it feels like to be persecuted because of my race, like Julius Lester does, and makes clear, in his essay. I will never be able to understand the full hurtful impact of the "n-word." I just know that racial epithets are hurtful to some people from certain interpretive communities, and although I respect this, I am not personally affected by such epithets in the way that they are, because I have never experienced racial persecution.

At the same time, I recognize the need to be wary of perceiving racism where racism is not meant, not intended. Such a thing would lead to unnecessary, and potentially destructive, conflicts. What if the text isn't inherently racist? If the book is banned,

torn apart, eliminated entirely, would we be destroying a racist text or a solid work of literature that may have presented to many people a positive message about childhood and adventure, about questioning backward social norms? I certainly fear the precedent such an action would be setting. Freedom of speech and artistic license would be greatly tampered with.

Perhaps it can be said that the ambiguity of the racism question is just one of the many thematic binaries in the text, and probably the most crucial among them. After reading Toni Morrison's essay, "Jim's Africanist Presence in *Huckleberry Finn*", in which she describes how the portrayal of the black character in a text is used to delineate the figure of the white character, that is, how the depiction of Jim's character as "enslaved", "marginalized" and "unnatural" serves to reinforce the "freedom", "centrality" and "naturalness" of Huck and the other white characters in the text, I began to see the plot as a series of binaries, with one part of the binary being favored over the other (i.e. white over black, freedom over slavery). A distinction is made between the marginalized Huck and Jim (the former having been marginalized because he is a rebel, the latter because he is black and a slave) and mainstream white society, depicted through characters like the Widow Douglas and Tom; rejecting the established social norms and ethics (as both Huck and Jim do- Jim breaks the rules by running away; Huck breaks the rules when he questions established religion and socially accepted views on what is right and wrong); immorality (for instance, it is made clear that Huck thinks that it was wrong for Jim to run away, and sinful for him to aid him in so doing. "All right, then, I'll go to hell" (201)) and morality; slave and slaveholder; and finally, unnaturalness (Jim) and naturalness (all white people).

The whole plot of the novel operates with the use of these binaries. Yet, to what extent can these binaries be said to be clear-cut and unambiguous? Huck and Jim are marginalized individuals within the society in which they live, yet they are *central* characters to the story we are reading. Huck is the narrator of the book. The reader hears his voice, reads their story. Huckleberry Finn is told from the perspective of the marginalized. Thus it centralizes the marginalized, and marginalizes the centralized (we only hear of characters like Tom and Widow Douglas *through* Huck, not otherwise), thereby leveling the hierarchy between the two, and eliminating the binary. What is more, Huck chooses to be a rebel. He chooses not to conform to social expectations and thereby willingly marginalizes himself. This action undercuts, to an extent, the negative connotations of the word "marginalization."

Similarly, the polarity between "morality" and "immorality" is blurred. Twain depicts what is acceptable behavior in white society, and then presents a lead character who rejects it all. What is more, he appears to be fully supporting Huck's decision to do so, even though it clearly goes against societal norms. Twain deliberately places Huck in a moral dilemma, a choice between turning Jim in (the socially "correct" action) and helping free Jim. Twain has Huck consciously decide to do the former, even if it means going to hell. Thus he simultaneously inverts common notions of heaven and hell: the former is now a destination meant for people who betray their friends, the latter a place for those who stick by them.

Readers are also made to question the binary of slave and slaveholder. In Chapter 31, Huck realizes that the dauphin has sold Jim to slaveholders, and resolves to free Jim from his slavery. Chapters 31-41 consist of Huck, and later Tom, attempting to do so in

roundabout, elaborate ways. In Chapter 42, it is revealed through Tom that Jim has already been freed. He has been free this whole time.

Finally, in a very controversial section of the text, Huck, recognizing Jim's goodness, describes him as a black man who is "white inside." Unsurprisingly, most critics (and I, too) found this to be highly racist and suggestive of the idea that "blackness" and "goodness" cannot coincide within a person. The only way that Jim can possibly be a good person is by being white in character (so let's forgive him the fact that he looks black, and celebrate that he is a white man internally). At the same time, Huck's words can be said to deconstruct the binary of color. Yes, it is probably the crudest possible way to do so, but Huck's recognition of their internal humanity (which he perhaps cannot help but define as "whiteness") is faintly reminiscent of modern views on race- the idea that regardless of how we differ externally, we are all equal humans internally.

If, then, we try to see the question of "racist" vs. "not racist" as a binary within itself, it should not be so difficult to deconstruct it, as well, especially if the question is viewed as a choice between "reason"/ "objectivity" and "feeling"/"ethics." Although the essays imply this, it is ridiculous to state that any article that utilizes reason is rejecting ethics, and is thus, unethical, and that any article that appeals to the reader from an ethical perspective is not utilizing reason as well, and is thus, unreasonable. Neither Justin Kaplan nor Seymour Chwast, nor any of the other critics who attempt to argue, using reason, that the text is not racist, ever state that racism, itself, is acceptable. They never argue that it is acceptable for the text to be racist. Both Kaplan and Chwast write with the assumption widely held in society today, that racism is inherently wrong and unforgivable. Thus, ethically, they are not so different from Jane Smiley and Julius Lester, who find the text racist and reject it for this reason. At the same time, Kaplan and Chwast seem to recog-

nize, as I did, that spotting racism where it does not exist could also lead to an ethical problem: it causes unnecessary conflicts. Kaplan states that Twain was by far "the least 'racist' of all the major writers of his time" (379), and was actually attempting to undercut slavery and racism through the use of irony and humor. Would it be ethical for us, then, to completely misunderstand his intention, label his book as some sort of evil, and ban it forever? Would it be ethical to tamper with freedom of speech, with artistic license, in this way? What kind of precedent would we be setting for the future?

Similarly, essays that appeal to the ethics in the reader are, by no means, unreasonable. Smiley and Lester's essays seemed as coherent, logical, and articulate as any of the others. Just because they roused my indignation over the evils of racism does not make them any less coherent, logical, and articulate. Smiley states that Twain himself was racist, which is why following the advent of the Duke and Dauphin, "Jim is pushed to the side of the narrative, hiding on the raft and confined to it" (459). Smiley also criticizes Twain's handling of the ending, stating that Tom undercuts Jim's valiant struggle for freedom by turning it into a silly game, a burlesque. Both of these are valid, reasonable points that had occurred to me, as well, as I was reading the text. There seems to be some implicit racism in the way Twain himself treats Jim's character, in the way he shapes the narrative to exclude him, to degrade him. This argument cannot be said to be the cause of the subjective overreaction of a particular interpretive community if so many critics, indeed, the majority of critics, all belonging to different interpretive communities, have recognized the textual deficiencies that Smiley and Lester describe. Yes, Lester is a black man who has personally experienced racial persecution. His personal experiences, his own feelings considering racism, probably added to his utter dislike for the text. But

does that mean his argument is unsound, unreasonable? Do you have to be a black man with experience of racial persecution, like him, to see the logic in his claims?

I have attempted to show that all of the thematic binaries in the text can be deconstructed. If we look at the "racist" vs. "not racist" question and the schism between ethics and reason as a binaries as well, it becomes clear that they, too, can be deconstructed. Just as all the binaries in the text, and all the binaries present in society itself, are arbitrary, social constructs- i.e. the binary of gender (male vs. female), the binary of sexuality (heterosexual vs. homosexual), the binary of race (white vs. black)- the racism question is a construct as well. What an individual chooses to believe about the nature of the text, whether it is racist, not racist, or perhaps both, depends on the interpretive community to which that individual belongs, as such communities are social constructs within themselves. This debate is, thus, somewhat external to the text, and is only applied to the text by readers. The text does not clearly and unambiguously state its intention in its presentation of race and racism. Perhaps it never intended *anything*. The question, in my opinion, is not whether the text itself is racist or not racist (as it is neither, until the reader's personal views, derived from his interpretive community, are applied to it, until the "binary" of the race question is constructed and attached to the novel), but, rather, whether the reader, the critic, the individual finds the text racist or not racist, and *why*. From the essays that I read, the viewpoints of classmates, and my own introspection about the text, I derived more information about myself, about individual perspectives, about interpretive communities, than I did about the text.

Works Cited:

- Chwast, Seymour. "Selling Huck Down The River." *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: A Case Study in Critical Controversy*. Ed. Gerald Graff and James Phelan. Boston: Bedford/ St Martin's, 2004. 466-470. Print.
- Fish, Stanley Eugene. *Is There A Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 1980. Print.
- Henry, Peaches. "The Struggle for Tolerance: Race and Censorship in *Huckleberry Finn*." *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: A Case Study in Critical Controversy*. Ed. Gerald Graff and James Phelan. Boston: Bedford/ St Martin's, 2004. 382-405. Print.
- Kaplan, Justin. "Born to Trouble: One Hundred Years of Huckleberry Finn." *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: A Case Study in Critical Controversy*. Ed. Gerald Graff and James Phelan. Boston: Bedford/ St Martin's, 2004. 370-381. Print.
- Lester, Julius. "Morality and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*." *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: A Case Study in Critical Controversy*. Ed. Gerald Graff and James Phelan. Boston: Bedford/ St Martin's, 2004. 362-370. Print.
- Morrison, Toni. "Jim's Africanist Presence in *Huckleberry Finn*." *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: A Case Study in Critical Controversy*. Ed. Gerald Graff and James Phelan. Boston: Bedford/ St Martin's, 2004. 305-310. Print.
- Smiley, Jane. "Say It Ain't So, Huck: Second Thoughts on Twain's 'Masterpiece'" *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: A Case Study in Critical Controversy*. Ed. Gerald Graff and James Phelan. Boston: Bedford/ St Martin's, 2004. 456-466. Print.

Indrani Sengupta is a sophomore majoring in English with an emphasis in Creative Writing. She hails from lovely India, and her interests include writing, reading, theater, and world cultures. She enjoys writing essays, and aspires to be a poet, author and playwright in the future.

Love it or Hate it

by Kassi Rasmussen

Although the makeover show *What Not to Wear* glorifies the complete transformation of its fashion victims, the process reveals a type of exploitation in the form of public humiliation. Peter Wollen, author of *On Gaze Theory*, explains that people find comfort in hiding: "So long as we are hidden, we are free; but once we are seen our freedom begins to bleed away" (Wollen 99). Women on *What Not to Wear* are subject to the judgments of the audience watching them, stripping them of their freedom to be hidden. The gaze theory indicates that the audience has a sense of power over the contestant. Because the power is in the one who is doing the gazing, being looked upon makes the object of the gaze vulnerable. This is certainly the case for the fashion victims portrayed on the show. Stacey and Clinton, the hosts and fashion gurus, identify women's imperfections and criticize their senses of style. Using the principles of the gaze theory can reveal that, although the transformation may be positive, the show denies contestants free will and challenges their personal identities as well as their self esteem. Is it a justified act for the hosts to criticize people publically to a point where it could have lasting effects, despite the presumably good outcome? Do you have to hate your body before you can learn to love yourself?

Peter Wollen's explanation of the gaze theory provides historical content tracing back to a "master-slave dialect" (93). This idea might be translated to the type of teacher-student relationship that *What Not to Wear* is based on. Stacey and Clinton are the teach-

ers and the fashion victims take the place of the students. *On Gaze Theory* explains that "the slave desires to occupy the place of the master and the master desires the recognition of his mastery from the slave" (93). Obviously the contestants who agree to be on the show are in it for the betterment of their fashion sense to become ultimately more attractive and stylish, like their fashion savvy hosts. This master-slave dialectic is seen when Stacey and Clinton have to monitor their "students'" shopping attempts through hidden cameras; they gaze upon them and become frustrated when their rules are overlooked and the fashion students disobey. Stacey and Clinton expect the contestants to recognize their authority and follow agreeably.

There is a power struggle here, where the students are expected to follow every wish of the hosts, even when it means giving up a piece of themselves. This process has proved to be emotional for the majority of the contestants, who sometimes disagree with the transformation and regret being on the show. The hardest part for most seems to be getting rid of all of their old clothes. In the sequence when Stacey and Clinton trash the old wardrobe and tease and joke about the lack of appeal and style, there is an aspect of the gaze theory in the relationship between the audience and the fashion victim. Trashing the wardrobe puts the entire TV audience in what gaze theory identifies as a position of power. The audience freely and openly gazes upon the wardrobe itself and the person herself. The wardrobe can reveal personal characteristics such as style, sexuality, and socio-economic status. This is all typically personal information that you wouldn't share with strangers, and in this way the audience is given power through the ability to peer into what the contestant's life may be like, unintentionally spying, as "the one looked at, the one made vulnerable, finds his identity draining away as he, or she, becomes merely an object for the other" (Wollen 98).

Perhaps the most personal and direct application of the gaze theory is in the 360 degree mirror portion of the show. The fashion victims are required to put on their most "unattractive" mistakes and be viewed by themselves, Stacey, Clinton, and the audience in the unforgiving mirror. The effect the mirror can have on the women is detrimental to their self-esteem. Some of Stacey's comments include, "I thought you would say you wear this outfit camping, because you would make a great tent" and "you look like some sort of Christmas troll." In criticizing the women's choice of wardrobe, Stacy and Clinton may be initiating psychological consequences by critiquing class and identity. It is very possible that Stacey and Clinton from time to time indoctrinate their fashion victims into becoming someone they are not. Many times the expert's choice of style just isn't practical to the contestant's way of life; some find it "too sexy" or simply "don't like it."

Another aspect of the gaze theory has to do with being conscious of oneself. Wollen asserts that "the human being is self-conscious, conscious of himself, of his human reality and dignity" (92). Although some could argue that viewing themselves in a negative scenario such as the mirror can be inspirational, it is unjust for this process to be televised and to allow the gazes of millions of viewers to see them in such a vulnerable state. Telling someone they look like "Archie Bunker in drag" isn't necessary to help them dress better; it is offensive as well as contrary to the building of personal dignity and humanity.

The "male gaze" is often times the most commercial form of the gaze theory (Wollen 99). *What Not to Wear* reinforces the male gaze on several fronts. A common reason women appear on the show is to win the attention of the opposite sex, in hopes of having the ability to get a date or even reform themselves for their significant others. Clinton serves as the male perspective on the show and both he and Stacey use concepts

of the male gaze when deciding on an outfit. Stacy and Clinton often refer to the females' bodies in a demeaning manner, which draws closer attention to their sexual attractiveness as "the girls." This is common knowledge that the hosts constantly have in mind how people will view their fashion students, and they encourage them to dress "appropriately." However, the concept behind the male gaze is that women are objectified by the desire in a male gaze. The competition of the gaze turns women into objects, and this is what the televised process seems to do.

One of the greatest critiques of the show on its website is that very few men appear on the show as fashion victims. This leaves a patriarchal message that men don't have as many fashion difficulties as women. Deborah Tannen's *Time* magazine article, "Marked Women, Unmarked Men," describes the inability for women to be free of judgment based on their appearance. Sometimes men are non-descript, but women on the other hand always come with a "marker:" they can wear too much makeup, wear too little makeup, be too risqué, be too covered. No matter the individual case, they will be "marked" in a certain way. Tannen gives the example of businessmen versus business women: men all wear similar suits and ties, but the women's attire differs from pantsuits, to skirts and dresses. Angela McRobbie, in the *Sociological Review*, contests that "women are actually becoming more marked." Women invited to participate in *What Not to Wear* are marked in various ways as a prerequisite for the show. The show searches for those with a distinct mark, and makes an example out of them through the process of transformation, essentially exploiting their confidence and securities to attract viewers. McRobbie identifies makeover shows as a safe outlet for viewers to "laugh at less fortunate people." The audience doesn't wish to see someone with a few faux-pas here and there; they like to see someone they can favorably compare themselves to, to receive

gratification, which is part of the reasoning for the televised process. Wollen defines this "visual pleasure" as "the enjoyment to be gained from mastery of the look, both as a spectator outside the film and through identification of the characters within it" (99).

Lastly, the gaze contributes to the growth of materialism. The objective of desire within the gaze explains the desire to look good for others and even want what they have. *What Not to Wear* once again falls subject to gaze theory in this aspect. Most contestants see fashion as an "afterthought" and find it to be second to practicality. While one contestant commented that "people shouldn't judge me on my clothes," Stacey and Clinton unfortunately do not find this to be true; not only are they judgmental of their victim's old clothes, but they send the timid shoppers to the fashion capital, or "citadel of materialism," New York City. Stacey and Clinton aren't teaching women to shop on a budget that is right for them, but instead send them into designer stores. A symptom of the introduction to the material world is what the show calls "sticker shock," where the unsuspecting fashion victims are forced to pay for ridiculously expensive clothes; most feel guilty and even liken the amount to bill payments. McRobbie comments on this connection between money and the makeover process as "the transformation of self with the help of experts in the hope or expectation of improvement of status and life chances through the acquisition of forms of cultural and social capital." The show's emphasis on high fashion breeds materialism and ignores the practicality and the contestant's other needs. *What Not to Wear*, instead of finding ways to better women mentally and emotionally, uses clothes as a material means to "fix" their confidence. One could speculate that this does just as much damage as good, because it makes it seem as if clothes are the only thing that validates women, and without dressing fashionably they would essentially be worthless. Nick, the

show's hairstylist, comments after a final transformation, "[you] look like you have a purpose." That is truly degrading to anyone regardless of the scale of transformation.

It could be argued that although the journey is emotional and challenging, the positives outweigh the negatives. All the women's problems seemed to be solved, which is what certainly appears to be true at the end of each makeover. However, there is more depth to the televised makeover process than just the positive outcome. The gaze theory explains the exploitation that goes on throughout the televised process. The negative portrayal of women on the show can make women see themselves negatively and mercilessly, which causes the audience to critique them similarly. This completely disregards the women's personal identity and individuality, and their freedom to be able to present themselves as they wish, instead of what the show makes the women out to be. *What Not to Wear* is powerful in this sense. It has the ability to style women, fabricating their made-over identities however they want, and to persuade the audience to believe the same. The show has the power to change people and even though the contestant may benefit from this materialized confidence, she is kept ignorant of the power the show has over her and unaware of how *What Not to Wear* manipulates her audience as well.

Works Cited

Levy, Ariel. "I Wish I Knew How to Enjoy it More." The Guardian (London). 17 May 2009. Lexis Nexis. Reed Elsevier Inc. November 2009. <lexisnexis.com>.

McRobbie, Angela. "Notes on 'What Not to Wear' and post-feministic symbolic violence." Sociological Review. November 2009. Web.

Tannen, Deborah. "Marked Women, Unmarked Men." New York Times Magazine. June 1993. Print.

TLC: *What Not to Wear*. Discovery Communications LLC, 2010. Web. Nov. 2009.

Wollen, Peter. "On Gaze Theory." *New Left Review*. Mar-Apr. 2007. Web. November 2009.

Kassi Rasmussen is a Sophomore planning to major in English with a Communications minor. She is interested in short fiction and creative writing, and hopes to become a speech writer or to work for a publishing company.

The Catholic Viewpoint of Science—and Evolution

by Kristen Rose Hatfield

One day, while I was in Brousseau Hall, the science building at Saint Mary's, I saw a classmate from Sociology. When he asked what I was there for, I replied that I was going to talk about religion with my professor. He teasingly said, "Kristen, *religion*, in a *science* building?! Get that stuff out of here!"

His remark reminded me of Richard Dawkins, in a way. Dawkins, a renowned scientist, outspoken atheist, and the Charles Simonyi Professor of the Public Understanding of Science at Oxford University, wrote about the pitfalls of religion in his international bestseller, *The God Delusion*. In a nutshell, Dawkins argues that a belief in any sort of supernatural being, such as the God of the Christian, Jewish, and Muslim faiths, is false, and that science can help prove this. He states that:

[A]ny creative intelligence, of sufficient complexity to design anything, comes into existence only as the end product of an extended process of gradual evolution. Creative intelligences, being evolved, necessarily arrive late in the universe, and therefore cannot be responsible for designing it. God, in the sense defined, is a delusion. (Dawkins 52)

He further argues that:

If he existed and chose to reveal it, God himself could clinch the argument, noisily and unequivocally, in his favour. And even if God's existence is never proved or disproved with certainty one way or the other, available evidence and reasoning may yield an estimate of probability far from 50 per cent. (Dawkins 73)

To 'disprove' God, Dawkins goes on to discuss how the trait of religiosity could simply have, for example, helped our species survive. He discusses natural selection (via group selection) for religion in humans, as well as the theory that humans are thus genetically and psychologically primed for religion.

However, the argument of Dawkins's that I wish to discuss today is not whether or not God exists, but rather, his argument that science and religion do not and should not co-exist. Dawkins argues that religion itself is harmful to science and humanity in general. Using examples of terrorism, ethnic cleansing, suicide bombers, and religious big-

otry around the globe, Dawkins claims that “religion can be a force for evil in the world” (Dawkins 324). Now, I can agree to some extent with this idea—religion does cause a lot of strife and war when two or more faiths collide. However, Dawkins goes on to claim that “religious faith is an especially potent silencer of rational calculation...it discourages questioning, by its very nature” (Dawkins 346). He gives the example of the Bible:

The truth of the holy book is an axiom, not the end product of a process of reasoning. The book is true, and if the evidence seems to contradict it, it is the evidence that must be thrown out, not the book. By contrast, what I, as a scientist, believe (for example, evolution) I believe not because of reading a holy book but because I have studied the evidence. It really is a very different matter. (Dawkins 319)

Dawkins feels that religious beliefs are blindly followed, in contradiction to science, whose facts and theories (the latter word used here in the scientific sense) are investigated and can be mended and added to. Dawkins proclaims:

As a scientist, I am hostile to fundamentalist religion because it actively debauches the scientific enterprise. It teaches us not to change our minds, and not to want to know exciting things that are available to be known. It subverts science and saps the intellect.” (Dawkins 321)

Dawkins fully believes that religion undermines science, working under the assumption that the two somehow must contradict each other. In these beliefs, Dawkins represents the very common—and popular—view of religion and science: that they cannot coexist in a person’s worldview, or that they are inevitably in opposition. Remember my story about my friend from Sociology? His remark succinctly illustrates this view. And ironically enough, when I saw him, I was headed to work on this project, which looks at how science and religion are often viewed as adversaries. But more so, this project looks at how that common belief is not necessarily true.

Take, for example, Catholicism. Though Dawkins claims that religion undermines scientific thought, Catholicism advocates for it. As Roman Catholic Cardinal Christoph Schönborn states in his article, “Creation and Evolution: To the Debate as It Stands:”

The proposition that the relationship between the Church and science is a bad one, that faith and science, since time immemorial, have been in a state of interminable conflict, belongs to the enduring myths of our time, indeed, I would say, to the acquired prejudices of our time. And, of course, the notion that generally goes along with it, like a musical accompaniment, is the notion that the Church has acted as an enormous inhibitor, with science the courageous liberator. (*New York Times*, October 2, 2005)

Shönborn asserts that this notion is incorrect when it comes to the Catholic Church. Pope John Paul II, in November 2005, stated, “scientific truth, which is itself a participation in divine Truth, can help philosophy and theology to understand ever more fully the human person and God’s Revelation about man... For this important mutual enrichment in the search for the truth and the benefit of mankind, I am, with the whole Church, profoundly grateful” (quoted by Benedict XVI, October 31, 2008). Catholics view the search for scientific truth as a way of using and understanding the gifts that God has given humanity. The Catholic Catechism (which describes the beliefs of the Church), states that “Our human understanding, which shares in the light of the divine intellect, can understand what God tells us by means of His creation” (Article 299). For Catholics, science is one tool to translate the world around us, to understand just how intricate and complex God’s gift, the universe, truly is. And Catholics do not, as Dawkins wrongly assumes, disregard reason. The Catechism also states:

Though faith is above reason, there can never be any real discrepancy between faith and reason, since the same God who reveals mysteries and infuses faith has bestowed the light of reason on the human mind. God cannot deny himself, nor can truth ever contradict truth. Consequently, methodological research, in all branches of knowledge, provided it is carried out in a truly scientific manner and does not override moral laws, can never conflict with the faith, because the things of the world and the things of faith derive from the same God. (Article 159)

Catholics are not against science. But what about evolution? Popular culture says that even if other aspects of science are not condemned, a religious person cannot and should not accept evolution. Does this really hold true for Catholics? Going to a Catholic school and taking Evolution as a class, I find it quite pertinent to understand exactly what the Catholic Church teaches about “believing in” evolution. Both science and Catholicism abound on campus, and many people have asked persons in the science community, “Is it hard studying [or teaching] evolution at a Catholic school?” Although few people realize it, the Catholic Church does not outright condemn evolutionary biology.

The Catholic Church initially condemned Darwin’s theory in the 1800s. Factually-speaking, the Catholic Church, in the past, did not immediately accept evolution or other scientific inquiries when they came to public attention. But there are several reasons behind this. The first key point to consider is somewhat overarching: these ‘official’ statements of acceptance or disbelief were (and are) made by leading representatives of the Church. And these representatives are human—they are not God, but they are indeed

trying to articulate what He wants for the Catholic religion. And this endeavor can be easily skewed by misunderstandings concerning the science itself or (especially) its intentions. As the representatives evaluate new scientific information through their prior understanding of the world and their social context, they must also interpret this new information through the lens of their current religious teachings. The representatives may find philosophical consequences—which they may perceive as intended or accidental threats—of the new scientific information that *seem* to go against teachings of the Church. But these teachings (i.e., interpretations of Scripture, views of what exactly God's creative power means, and so on) are only derivatives of the core religious beliefs (in these same examples, the Scripture passages themselves or that God created the universe). And though derived from a core religious belief, these teachings are not necessarily the only possible conclusions to stem from this core belief. And so, when Church representatives evaluate new scientific knowledge, they may see it as contradictory or threatening to these derived teachings, but the science may in fact not actually oppose the *core* religious belief.

An illustrative example of this is Galileo Galilei and his heliocentric view of the solar system. At the time of his advocacy of the Copernican view of the universe, the Catholic Church held that the earth did not move and that everything else revolved about it. The sun and the sky were of Heaven, and they were bodies made to revolve around the earth. The Church based this belief on biblical passages, taken literally. Galileo, a Catholic, had no problem with the idea that the sun was the center of our system; he felt that biblical passages describing the earth—for example, “the LORD set the earth on its foundations; it can never be moved” (Psalm 104:5)—as symbolic phrases, not scientific descriptions. But Galileo's astronomy disturbed the Medieval view of the heavens as God's literal home in the sky; hence, many Church leaders saw this as a direct threat to God's existence, though Galileo's ideas only opposed the *derived* teachings, not the core belief of God.

Evolution is similar in this sense: people were all too quick to view the implications of evolution as being against the notion of God. And like Galileo's, Charles Darwin's theory was at first condemned as anti-Christian. But those who opposed Darwin were possibly evaluating this discovery using a skewed, derived belief. Furthermore, as Professor David (Zach) Flanagan, Associate Professor of Theology and Religious Studies,

explained to me: during Darwin's time, the school of critical biblical history was blossoming; people were trying to 'disprove' the Bible and the existence of God. A major enemy of the Church was 'methodological atheism,' where God is not part of the explanatory apparatus, nor is He the sole answer to questions about life and creation, such as "where did we come from." People were using the sciences as a criticism of biblical history. And so, when a scientific theory cropped up that seemed to contradict a long-held view of Catholics, such as evolution contradicting 'special creation,' the Church saw it as part of the critical atheistic movement of the time. And while the Catholic Church has, for centuries, viewed Genesis—the story of Creation—as more mystical and symbolic than necessarily literal, Church leaders were nevertheless fearful of Darwin's theory: his explanation of the world's natural history did not overtly include a causal God, and many people could have used Darwin's theory of evolution to "disprove" God. The Church wanted to nip the problem in the bud, and so Darwin's theory was not accepted.

But the Catholic Church has now officially stated that evolution is not contradictory to God's role as the Creator. Beginning in 1950, when Pope Pius XII, in *Humani Generis*, addressed the question of evolution, continuing to Pope John Paul II and the current Pope Benedict XVI, we see that, as Benedict XVI stated in a speech on October 31, 2008, "there is no opposition between faith's understanding of creation and the evidence of the empirical sciences." Acceptance of evolution does not mean shedding the belief that God created the world and humankind. As John Paul II, quoting the *Humani Generis* of Pius XII, stated in his 1986 speech, "The Magisterium of the Church is not opposed to the theory of evolution...Here the theory of evolution is understood as an investigation of the origin of the human body from pre-existing living matter, for the Catholic faith obliges us to hold firmly that souls are created immediately by God." In other words, evolution and science in general are wonderful ways to study how the human *body* came about; it's just that Catholics recognize that the soul is separate from this. The human soul is special in God's eyes. As John Paul II goes on to say, "According to the hypothesis [of evolution] mentioned, it is possible that the human body, following the order impressed by the Creator on the energies of life, could have been gradually prepared in the forms of antecedent living beings. However, the human soul, on which man's humanity definitively depends, cannot emerge from matter, since the soul is of a spiritual nature" (April 16, 1986). Understanding the evolution of the human body is in no way against the

Church's beliefs, as long as one understands that there is more than this. As the Catholic Catechism points out, "Basic scientific research, as well as applied research, is a significant expression of man's dominion over creation...By themselves, however, they cannot disclose the meaning of existence and of human progress" (Article 2293). Both the Catechism and the Pope are attempting to demonstrate that science in itself—including evolution—is a wonderful gift we as humans use to understand the world, but Catholics should just recognize that God is the Creator, and He gives all the world meaning.

Some debate continues within the Church over fully accepting the *implications* of evolution. Many Catholics are not necessarily wrestling with the process of evolution itself—they understand it and accept it as a valid and rational theory—but its (alleged) philosophical formulations of God as having 'nothing to do with it' make some members of the Catholic Church uncomfortable. Many Catholics, while they accept the idea of shared ancestry and species' changes through time (sometimes including the evolution of man), feel that the "random" and "unintentional" nature of evolution pushes God out of the picture.

Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, the Roman Catholic cardinal archbishop of Vienna quoted earlier, has been quite vocal about these implications. In his op-ed piece in the *New York Times*, "Finding Design in Nature," (July 7, 2005), Schönborn argues that the Catholic Church does not fully accept evolution. He first states that "Evolution in the sense of common ancestry might be true, but evolution in the neo-Darwinian sense — an *unguided, unplanned* process of *random* variation and natural selection — is not. Any system of thought that denies or seeks to explain away the overwhelming evidence for design in biology is ideology, not science" (emphasis added). He feels that neo-Darwinian evolution tries to deny God. Schönborn argues that while the Catholic Church may accept that change has taken and continues to take place in natural history, the Church sees this as *guided* and *designed* by God. In other words, Schönborn feels that science, important in seeking truth, needs to be seen through the eyes of faith and creation. In a later lecture from October 2, 2005, Schönborn states, "I see no difficulty in joining belief in the Creator with the theory of evolution, but under the prerequisite that the borders of scientific theory are maintained." His meaning? Science describes the physical world, but Catholics need to recognize that God is the willful and decisive creator of all; he calls Catholics to place science within the context of God. According to Schönborn,

evolution's "randomness" cannot become part of a Catholic view of creation, and so he argues that a full acceptance of evolution has not occurred. Shönborn also claims that people have actually been misquoting the Church regarding views of evolution. For example, "neo-Darwinists recently have sought to portray our new pope, Benedict XVI, as a satisfied evolutionist. They have quoted a sentence about common ancestry from a 2004 document of the International Theological Commission, pointed out that Benedict was at the time head of the commission, and concluded that the Catholic Church has no problem with the notion of 'evolution' as used by mainstream biologists." Shönborn then cites this same commission as actually stating, "an unguided evolutionary process — one that falls outside the bounds of divine providence — simply cannot exist." Shönborn is trying to show that the Catholic Church is not okay with the backbone of the theory, that it is a *random* process of mutations, genetic drift, chance changes in environment, and so on that propel evolution. Shönborn even quotes Benedict XVI, who recently proclaimed: "We are not some casual and meaningless product of evolution. Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary." I think that Shönborn's argument can be summed up in the quote he took from John Paul II: "It is clear that the truth of faith about creation is radically opposed to the theories of materialistic philosophy. These view the cosmos as the result of an evolution of matter reducible to pure chance and necessity." For some Catholics, this 'chance' is a major issue in accepting evolution alongside creation.

But Shönborn represents only a portion of Catholics. Kenneth R. Miller, a biology professor (and a Catholic) at Brown University, addresses this "issue" of "chance" in his book, *Finding Darwin's God: A Scientist's Search for Common Ground Between God and Evolution*. Miller, who has, on the side of evolution, debated *against* creationists, advocates of intelligent design, and others, does not see himself as rebelling against his Catholic faith in any way. In *Finding Darwin's God*, Miller lines up why evolution is correct in its whole and 'uncensored' version (including the notion of 'chance'), why it also does not contradict with religion, and how it can actually strengthen one's faith. Miller does understand that, "For many religious people, here lies the problem with evolution...Doesn't the very randomness of evolution rule out any notions of divine purpose? ...[I]f mankind is the intentional creation of God... how could He possibly have used evolution to fashion the very creatures He made in His own image and likeness?"

(Miller 234). Miller answers this supposedly colossal issue in simple terms: he shows that 'chance' really is not an issue in Christianity. Miller describes:

A Christian...sees his life...and his small place in history as parts of God's plan. He has faith that God expects him to use his talents and abilities in God's name...He accepts the adversity that comes into his life as a challenge from God, and he sees apparent misfortune as an opportunity to do good in the service of both God and man. These non-controversial elements of Christian teaching are so ordinary that we sometimes forget that what they imply about the interplay of history, free will, and chance. To put it simply, they mean that God, if He exists, surpasses our ordinary understanding of chance and causality...This means that Christians *already* agree that the details of a historical process can be driven by chance, that to allow for individual free will the outcome of such a process need not be preordained, and that the final result of the process may nonetheless be seen as part of God's will. (Miller 235)

If Catholics said that God controlled every single event, then He would be to blame for trees falling on cars, buses full of children slipping off a bridge, disease taking a loved-one's life, and all the other natural events that affect our lives, even in negative ways. But Miller tries to show that Catholics view these things as "chance" which is nonetheless allowed and foreseen by God. This is how I understand it: chance is like free will, in a sense. In the Catholic notion of free will, we have the ability to choose to do good or evil, to follow or defy what God wants us to do. And though it is a free choice, it is still known and is still somehow part of God's "plan." He knows what we will choose, even if He does not choose it for us. Just because it is preordained does not make it controlled. It is still a "chance" of sorts, but a chance that helps fulfill God's purpose. And as Miller states, "God's purpose does not always submit to human analysis. God's means are beyond our ability to fathom, and just because events seem to have ordinary causes, or seem to be the result of chance, does not mean that they are not part of that divine plan" (Miller 236).

So Miller shows that the oft-sited "issue" of the random nature of evolutionary theory should really not be an issue at all. So why do so many religious people, even some Catholics, still refuse to accept evolution as fact? Miller shows insight on this question as well. As Miller puts it:

Less than half of the U.S. public believes that humans evolved from an earlier species. The reason, I would argue, is not because they aren't aware of the strength of the scientific evidence behind it. Instead, it is because of a well-founded belief that the concept of evolution is used routinely, in the intellectual

sense, to justify and advance a philosophical worldview that they regard as hostile and even alien to their lives and values.” (Miller 167)

And this worldview is that everything is meaningless: “It is not that evolution’s version of natural history threatens to unseat the central Biblical myths of unitary creation and the Flood. Rather, it is the chilling prospect that evolution might succeed in convincing humanity of the fundamental purposelessness of life” (Miller 187). This goes back to what Shönborn tried to argue. But even if Catholics are okay with chance in general, they feel attacked by the argument that many atheistic advocates of evolution, such as the likes of Dawkins, push into public view: because evolution is a random process, it somehow proves that life is without purpose. But as I just demonstrated, Miller and other Catholics do not believe this at all. To them, this ‘proof of meaninglessness’ is a fallacy.

But there’s another issue, one which Miller points out but cannot personally rectify, that keeps people wary of evolution. Many people still refuse to accept evolution because of:

...the reflexive hostility of so many within the scientific community to the goals, the achievements, and most especially to the culture of religion itself. This hostility, sometimes open, sometimes covert, sharpens the distinctions between religious and scientific cultures, produces an air of conflict between them, and dramatically increases the emotional attractiveness of a large number of anti-scientific ideas, including creationism. (Miller 167)

Sadly, even though science and faith are far from adversary, as both Shönborn and several Popes have tried to cement in our minds, people have become polarized in their beliefs. It’s like gossip gone wrong in a high school: one person from one group of friends, who may or may not reflect the views of the whole group, starts a horrible rumor about another group down the hall. That latter group hears the remark, and an outspoken member retorts with a not-so-kind observation of the first group. Feelings get hurt, people feel attacked, and lo-and-behold, where some of the two groups’ members may have been friends or amiable teammates, there is now strife and strict division. And it’s a difficult rift to mend. Just look at our political system as an example: people are so easily offended by the “other side’s” remarks. So how do we fix this painful rift between science and religion that so many people experience? I really don’t have an answer, but perhaps if religious people better understand the argument for allowing science—and evolution—into their belief system, then some of the perceived (and real) antagonism may dissipate.

Shönborn argues that science not only supports Catholicism, but can actually amplify one's faith:

Could anyone then have known how unbelievably complex, wonderful, incomprehensible the atom is? Could anyone have conceived just how incredibly fascinating can be a single cell and all its functions? Has this wealth of knowledge nonetheless in some way forced us to abandon our belief in the Creator? Has this knowledge driven Him out, or has it, on the contrary, rendered it all the more meaningful and reasonable to believe in Him — with much better supporting evidence, through deeper insights into the marvelous world of Nature, so that faith in a Creator has really become easier? ("Creation and Evolution")

Likewise, Miller believes in God, not "*despite* evolution," as many people put it, but perhaps "*because of* evolution," to some extent at least. For Catholics, who see the universe as "a gift addressed to man, an inheritance destined for and entrusted to him" (Catholic Catechism, Article 302), just understanding how complex this world of ours is, to understand how much it took to get to where we are, is amazing. For instance, the Church has accepted Galileo's heliocentrism (along with the rest of kinematics and astrophysics), and just look at what this has brought to Catholicism: God created the moon and stars, this we've known, but now, Catholics know *just* how much this entails. Galileo and others have enlarged the Catholic view of the world around us, and so they have, in a sense, enlarged the power of God as Catholics understand it. Yes, Galileo's theories threatened the medieval view of God's palace in the sky, but look what more it brought. Carl Sagan, in *Pale Blue Dot*, writes, "A religion, old or new, that stressed the magnificence of the Universe as revealed by modern science might be able to draw forth reserves of reverence and awe hardly tapped by the conventional faiths" (quoted in Dawkins, 33). But Sagan doesn't realize that Catholicism does just that: Catholics accept science, they accept the vastness of our universe, and they see it all as the work of God. And like the scientific view of the universe itself, evolution has also been accepted by the Catholic Church. Miller writes:

We have been freed to understand the change of seasons not as divine whim but as a consequence of the tilt of the earth's axis in relation to its orbit around the sun. We watch the movement of tides under the calculable power of gravity, produce new substances by rearranging the atoms of raw materials, and exploit the energy of elementary particles to power our homes and send messages through space. We have learned enough of the natural world to understand that it operates according to physical principles that are accessible through science. In a sense, all that Charles Darwin did was to extend this understanding, so clear and so powerful in the physical world, into the sphere of biology. (Miller 168)

Science expands our understanding of the world, and also our understanding of biology—life itself. And thus evolution, which describes how life has unfolded on this earth, helps us understand God's works in a far-more detailed way. Miller goes on to say:

It is high time that we grew up and left the Garden [of Eden's imagery]...it is time to place Genesis alongside the geocentric myth in the basket of stories that once...made helpful sense. As we walk through the gates, aware of the dazzling richness of the genuine biological world, there might even be a smile on the Creator's face—that at long last His creatures have learned enough to understand His world as it truly is. (Miller 56)

So what *about* the myth of Creation? Evolution can explain how organisms progressed and changed through time, but what about the *start*?

I suppose the question is this: if Catholics accept evolution and Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, then what becomes of the Book of Genesis, the *original* 'Origin' book? Miller suggests that "the answer is in Genesis itself...As more than one modern reader has noted, Genesis 1 and 2 present creation narratives differing dramatically in their essential details" (Miller 256). As I discussed earlier, many Catholics understand this fact and realize that Genesis is probably not a *literal* description of creation. Miller, quoting Saint Augustine, reiterates that "Sacred scripture, in Augustine's words, 'has been written to nourish our souls,' not to present us with a scientific description of the world" (Miller 256). But Miller makes a noteworthy point about the story-book feel of Genesis; as he explains, "In order to reveal Himself to a desert tribe six thousand years ago, a Creator would hardly have lectured them about DNA and RNA, about gene duplication and allopatric speciation. Instead, knowing exactly what they would understand, He spoke to them in the direct and lyrical language of Genesis" (Miller 257). But to Miller and other Catholics, this lyrical language is not necessarily 'untrue.' For example, Miller gives the example of Adam being formed from dust: "To any biochemist, even an evolutionary biochemist, the notion that human life was formed from the dust of the earth is not only poetic, but scientifically accurate to an astonishing degree...[This passage] would tell us simply that the materials of the human body were taken from the earth itself, which of course is true" (Miller 256). So Genesis, on second (or perhaps this is the third?) glance, is not necessarily too far off. So is God still the Creator, as depicted? Miller argues that "evolution does not deny the biblical account, but rather completes it" (Article 258). Catholics have held for centuries that God created Man and the world, but now Catholics

can understand *how*. Miller argues that “His will to create...was reflected in the construction of matter itself, from the laws of chemistry to the gravitational constant, and made the evolution of life in the universe a certainty. By any standard, God’s work in creating the universe amounts—literally—to a command that the earth and its waters ‘bring forth life’” (Miller 257). Miller is trying to say that God *created evolution* and other natural laws to make the world as we know it. For Catholics, God is the Creator of all the mechanisms of the universe.

And if God created evolution and the universe’s laws, and these laws continue to act upon us today, then God is still active, still ‘creating.’ Pope Benedict XVI proclaimed, “To state that the foundation of the cosmos and its developments is the provident wisdom of the Creator is not to say that creation has only to do with the beginning of the history of the world and of life. It implies, rather, that the Creator founds these developments and supports them, underpins them and sustains them continuously” (Benedict XVI, October 31, 2008). As the Catholic Catechism states, “We believe that it [the world] proceeds from God’s free will” (Article 295), but also that “Creation has its own goodness and proper perfection, but it did not spring forth complete from the hands of the Creator. The universe was created ‘in a state of journeying’ toward an ultimate perfection yet to be attained” (Article 302). This end-perfection is not contradictory to the “random” course of evolution, but, as Miller earlier explained, is part of God’s “plan.” As the Catechism goes on to say, “For ‘all things are open and laid bare to His eyes,’ even those things which are yet to come into existence through the free action of creatures” (Article 302). Like my earlier discussion of chance, just because it is up to an individual (be it a genetic mutation or person), and is therefore not inherently controlled by God, it does not mean that God does not know of it, at least in the Catholic mindset. And, moreover, some Catholics view God as somehow *using* this evolution, this chance, to His plan’s benefit, though it is not explainable how. In the words of Miller, “A God who presides over an evolutionary process is not an impotent, passive observer. Rather, He is one whose genius fashioned a fruitful world in which the process of continuing creation is woven into the fabric of matter itself...He is the master of chance and time, whose actions, both powerful and subtle, respect the independence of His creation and give human beings the genuine freedom to accept or to reject His love” (Miller 243).

Catholics believe in free will, the right to choose. And many of them have chosen evolution. They have chosen science. Catholics don't disregard factual explanations as antagonistic to their belief in creation, but they regard them as augmenters. Catholicism and evolution don't contradict—they strengthen and complete one another. Contrary to popular belief, and contrary to Dawkins, Catholicism does not undermine scientific reason, but calls for it. Science, seen as a gift from God, has led Catholics to a deeper knowledge of the world their God has created—and continues to create. Catholics don't pick and choose parts of science and evolution; they simply recognize that there is a meaning and purpose behind it all. Catholics choose reason, facts, investigation, and most importantly, Catholics choose truth. As Kenneth R. Miller rightly states, "By recognizing the continuing force of evolution, a religious person acknowledges that God is every bit as creative in the present as He was in the past. That—and not a rejection of any of the core ideas of evolution—is why I am a believer" (Miller 258).

Works Cited

- Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Second Ed. English translation for the United States ©1994, United States Catholic Conference, Inc.
<<http://www.usccb.org/catechism/text/a.shtml>>.
- Dawkins, Richard. *The God Delusion*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006.
- David (Zach) Flanagan, Associate Professor of Theology and Religious Studies, Saint Mary's College of California. Personal interview, November 19, 2009.
- Miller, Kenneth R. *Finding Darwin's God: A Scientist's Search for Common Ground Between God and Evolution*. New York, London, Toronto, and Sydney: Harper Perennial, 1999.
- Pope Benedict XVI. "Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Members of the Pontifical Academy of Science on the Occasion of Their Plenary Assembly." October 31, 2008.
<http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2008/october/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20081031_academy-sciences_en.html>.
- Pope John Paul II. "Man is a Spiritual and Corporeal Being." Speech to a general audience. April 16, 1986.
<http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/audiences/apha/data/aud1986016en.html>.

Shönborn, Christoph Cardinal, the Roman Catholic cardinal archbishop of Vienna.
"Creation and Evolution: To the Debate as It Stands." Speech, October 2, 2005, St.
Stephan's Cathedral, Vienna. Provided Courtesy of *Eternal Word Television Net-
work*.

<<http://www.ewtn.com/library/Theology/schonevo1.htm>>.

———. "Finding Design in Nature." *New York Times*. July 7, 2005.

<<http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/science/sc0060.html>>.

Kristen Rose Hatfield, currently a senior at Saint Mary's, an Anthropology/Biology split-major (with a Religious Studies minor), and a Northwesterner by heart, finds utter joy in science, God, and connecting the two. A champion for both evolution and her Christian faith, she lets this Honors Project reflect her avid desire to share what has been written on her heart: that science—specifically evolution—and Christianity don't have to be at war.